

INVESTITURE MASS OF KNIGHTS AND DAMES OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

ST PATRICK'S CHURCH, ANDERSTON, GLASGOW

SATURDAY 13TH SEPTEMBER 2008

INTRODUCTION:

I am indeed very happy to be here with you this morning as your Grand Prior for this Investiture Mass. Here in Glasgow we are in this very beautiful parish church dedicated to St Patrick and are privileged to follow the new liturgical ceremonial both for the Vigil yesterday evening conducted by Archbishop Mario Conti Archbishop of Glasgow and now for the Investiture conducted by myself as the Grand Prior.

As well as taking part in the Investiture each one of us has the opportunity of reaffirming our own commitment as Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem and trying to grow in our own knowledge and love of God in this Mass as we give him all glory and honour.

During the summer months I was privileged to witness to our faith in two great pilgrimages: The first on a pilgrimage to Lourdes with my own Archdiocese marking the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of our Blessed Lady to St Bernadette; and the second along with the youth of the world to Sydney Australia to a magnificent manifestation of faith led by Pope Benedict XVI.

I would like to speak of each of these pilgrimages briefly to you this morning.

PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES:

As you know countless pilgrims had journeyed to Lourdes this particular year because of the 150th anniversary celebrations.

As always various events in that pilgrimage were outstanding: One thinks of the moments of silent prayer at the Grotto; the processions of the Blessed Sacrament during each day and the torchlight processions each evening; and then the daily celebration of Mass in the shrines of Lourdes leading up to the Sunday celebration of Mass in the vast underground Basilica. As a Cardinal Archbishop I was principal celebrant on the Sunday of our own pilgrimage with ten bishops, about 400 priests and approximately 100,000 people gathered in the packed underground Basilica. This was a great moment of prayer and praise – but one which caused me to ponder on our own individual role in the Church and in the world.

Thinking of the meaning of Lourdes I realised that both our Blessed Lady herself as well as St Bernadette were simply small cogs in the great wheel which is the Church moving us ever closer to God Our Father in Heaven. I realised that each and every cog is important whether the unborn in the womb, in a wheelchair or hospital bed, young or old. Each one of us is important in the life of the Church and in the life of our world at this present time.

In our liturgy today we will be reminded that being a Knight or Dame of the Holy Sepulchre “means witnessing the Kingdom of Christ, and spreading the Church, as well as working for charity, with the same profound spirit of faith and love”.

That call to witness the Kingdom of Christ and spread the Church is a call which goes out to each one of us – and perhaps nevermore so than at this present time.

One might say that the witness of each one of us as a Christian is vitally important and nevermore so than at this present time as there will be ongoing debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. One might have been tempted to think that no one of us is all that important – but surely the Christian voice in the recent by-election in Glasgow East was more than vitally important. One might be tempted to think that in the forthcoming by-election in Glenrothes again the individual Christian voice is not all that important. But I say to each and every individual who is concerned about the future of our society the individual Christian voice is more than ever important.

As perhaps you know I wrote to each and every Member of Parliament about the forthcoming debate and vote on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill later this autumn. I asked each of our Members of Parliament to use the time given to them to examine their consciences and to use the time ahead wisely to reflect on the likely outcome of the consequences of their actions and their decisions. Yes – each individual cog in the great wheel of society as in the great wheel of the Church is more ever important with regard to decision making in our country.

PILGRIMAGE WITH POPE BENEDICT XVI WITH WORLD YOUTH DAY IN SYDNEY AUSTRALIA:

The other great pilgrimage in which I was privileged to take part during the summer was to Sydney Australia when I united with almost half a million young people from all over the world praying with them and praising God, and listening to the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI.

I have quoted the words in our ceremony this morning that “becoming a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre means witnessing the Kingdom of Christ and spreading the Church”, When conferring the insignia I also say to the Knights: “While all men must follow their consciences to make the effort to be fair and honest all the more reason that the Knight of the Holy Sepulchre should make every possible effort also”.

Consequently I again call you to be witnesses to Christ throughout the world but particularly to be fair and honest in your own homes, your local communities, and your parishes.

Just last week the World Health Organisation quoting statistics first published in a Glasgow Centre for Population Health Report two years ago gave frightening statistics. If a person is born and raised in the Calton area of Glasgow the life expectancy is 54 years; on the other hand the life expectancy of a person born and brought up in neighbouring Lenzie just eight miles or a ten minute drive away is 82 years. What an indictment of the ways that some of our sisters and brothers are living at this present time and within the same City. Similar statistics are produced worldwide: I mentioned my visit to Australia where Aboriginal men live an average of 59.4 years, fifteen years less than the average Australian male at 76.6 years; in Russia a twenty year old male who is university educated can expect to live an average of 52 years, more than ten years longer than his primary school educated counterpart at just 40 years. We must wonder what the situation will be now and in the years to come when we have been reminded that the economic times faced by Britain and the rest of the world “are arguably the worst they’ve been in 60 years”.

It is in the midst of such situations around us that we are called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. Pope Benedict XVI reminded the young people of the world of this in Australia when he stated:

“You are already well aware that our Christian witness is offered to a world which in many ways is fragile. The unity of God’s creation is weakened by wounds which run particularly deep when social relations break apart, or when the human spirit is all but crushed through the exploitation and abuse of persons”.

And he went on to add that society today is being fragmented “because it disregards the full horizon of truth – the truth about God and about us”.

CONCLUSION:

Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre have been important throughout history in the defence of Christian standards especially in the Holy Land. Christian witness must be seen to be important by each one of us living out our lives in the Church and in the world today. May our Christian voices be ever more loudly heard: may our Christian witness be evermore obviously seen – in the situations in which we live here in our own country not only those countries especially the Holy Land which we visit occasionally.

We have indeed been called by our ceremony today to be effective witnesses to Jesus Christ and his love and his teaching. May we receive the inspiration which we need from our time together today and throughout this year.